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FOR THE

BENEFIT OF A SOCIETY OF LADIES,

INSTITUTED FOR THE RELIEF OF

POOR WIDOWS WITH SMALL CHILDREN.

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A SERMON,

&c.



JAMES ii. 18.

Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

THERE are not a few who believe, that it is of little consequence what a man's faith is, provided his life be right. There are those too who believe, that it is of little consequence what a man's life is, provided his faith be right. The truth is, that where a man's life is wrong, his faith cannot be right; and where his faith is wrong, his life cannot be right.—The error of some is a reliance on their own good works; the error of others is an unwarrantable reliance on the grace of God, without the evidence of a holy life and conversation. Seriously considered brethren, it is of very little consequence, whether men go to hell by relying exclusively on their own righteousness; or by trusting to the mercy of God through a faith which is unproductive of good works. After all that is said about the freeness of divine grace, and the justification of the sinner by faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, (and too much cannot be said,) it is still true, that no man will be saved, who is not sanctified by the Spirit, as well as justified by the righteousness of God. No man

will be saved *on account of* his personal righteousness ; but no man will ever be saved *without* personal righteousness. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* The simple fact is, that the faith of the Gospel, and the works of the Gospel, necessarily and inseparably co-exist.

What doth it profit, saith the Apostle, what doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say, he hath faith and have not works ? Can faith save him ? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works ; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. The apostle insists upon works as a necessary manifestation of faith. Our text suggests this important truth :

THAT FAITH AND GOOD WORKS ARE INSEPARABLY CONNECTED.

In attempting to prove this, I propose to show,

I. What *Faith* is.

II. What *Good Works* are. And.

III. Point out *the inseparable connexion between them.*

I. *What is Faith?*

Faith, in its most simple form, is *receiving the truth of God in the love of it.* The word of God speaks of faith as it regards God as its object, as it regards Christ as its object, and as it regards the whole system of revealed truth. The most express definition of faith which we have in the Bible, is this, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It is that grace, implanted in the heart by the effectual agency of the Holy Spirit, by which invisible and future things are beheld as solemn and interesting realities. Faith realizes the scenes of a future world. It brings God, and Christ, and judgment, and eternity, near to the mind, and enables the believer *to endure as seeing Him who is invisible,* and to act in view of things that are to come, as though they were already present. Thus is faith *the reliance of the heart upon the testimony of God.* I say it is *the reliance of the heart,* because it is something more than the simple assent of the understanding to the truth ; something more than the simple belief that God is a God that cannot lie. It is an affection of the heart. *With THE HEART man believeth unto righteousness.*

Faith, when it is viewed as that evangelical grace which forms the mystical union between Christ and

the believer, is more definite in its form. It regards Christ particularly as its object. It respects him in his character and in his offices, especially his Priestly office. It views him as the Great Mediator between the offended Sovereign and his rebellious subjects; as the bleeding victim; the all-sufficient sacrifice; *the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*. Faith receives the Saviour. It is a cordial acceptance of Christ, as he is offered in the Gospel.

If faith be reduced to a single exercise of heart, it is *confidence in Christ as a Divine Saviour*. When a sinner, feeling his helpless and ruined state, longing to be delivered from the power and the punishment of sin, looks around for help, and Christ is presented to his view, he confides in Him as one who is able, willing, and faithful to save. His anxious heart turns toward the precious Saviour, and there he rests. Christ's blood is his hope; Christ's righteousness his merit; Christ's cross his refuge. Now what can induce a lost sinner, at a moment when his eternal well-being is at stake, to give up himself, and venture all upon Christ? What can induce a lost and trembling sinner, at a moment when his conscience trembles with alarm, to turn to Calvary and retire beneath the cross? Not love simply; (though love is the main ingredient in faith,) not reverence; not admiration; but *trust, confidence, faith*. It is a disposition to *rely implicitly upon the word and character of Christ as they are revealed in the scriptures of*

truth. Sensible of his weakness and his ill desert, the believer, confiding in the mercy, the power, the wisdom, and the faithfulness of the Redeemer, yields up himself, to be governed by his laws and to be saved by his death. He submits to his sovereignty, and trusts in his grace. The character of Christ appears to him as it is most forcibly described, *glorious in holiness* ; his word, as the certainty of truth itself. The excellence of Christ, as it is displayed in the work of redemption, as it is manifested in the doctrines, in the promises, in the rewards, and in the punishments of the gospel ; it is this that gives vigour to the faith of the Christian. With a supreme attachment to Christ, he surrenders his immortal soul into his hands, to be disposed of at his pleasure, and to be the instrument of promoting his glory. Thus he believes ; thus is his faith *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* I proceed,

II. To the nature of *good works*.

Many works are called good by man, which are not good in the sight of God. Many a splendid action will be disowned in Heaven, to which monuments and statues have been raised on earth. In inquiring therefore into the nature of good works, we are to inquire, what is the nature of those works which are good when compared with the spirit of the gospel ? Many an action appears liberal and humane ; it is dictated by the “ social principle ;” it is the effusion of a noble and a generous spirit ; but when compared

with the great standard of human action, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, it is found wanting.

The Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. What then are those works, which are good in the sight of God ? Here we cannot fail to lay down the broad principle, that *the moral quality of every action lies in the disposition of heart with which it is performed.* As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. The merit or demerit of all external actions lies in the heart of the agent. Aside from the views and feelings of heart with which an overt act is performed, the act itself is neither virtuous nor vicious. Good external actions may flow from a very bad heart. It is possible for men to be as blameworthy in performing the best external actions, as in performing the worst. If an external action is good, the purity of it is measured by the disposition of heart with which it is performed. If bad, the guilt of it is measured by the same rule. If a man intends to perform a bad action, and accidentally performs one which, so far as regards the consequences of the action, is a good one, he is as criminal as though he carried his evil intention into effect, and performed an action attended by all the evil consequences which he expected and desired. On the other hand, if a man, with an enlightened conscience, intends to perform a good action, and accidentally performs one, which, so far as its regards the consequences of the action, is a bad one, he is as meritorious as though he had carried his good intention

into effect, and performed an action attended by all the good consequences which he expected and desired. In either case, "the will is taken for the deed."

We shall find this principle confirmed, by advert-
ing to the spirit of the moral law. The law of God, which requires and forbids external actions, requires and forbids them only as expressions of the heart. The law of God neither requires nor forbids external actions separately from the heart. God requires a good, and forbids a bad heart; and he requires and forbids nothing but what is the expression of a heart that is either good or bad. He requires men to do all that they do, with a pure, benevolent heart, and forbids them to do any thing with a heart that is impure and selfish. *Now the end of the commandment, saith an apostle, is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.*

Now, if these things are so, we see at once what is the nature of good works. Those, and those only are good works, which are performed with a right disposition of heart. A disposition to perform good works on principles truly evangelical, must exist, before any good works are performed. In the heart of man this disposition does not naturally exist. Our wretched and depraved hearts are naturally fruitful in that which is evil; noxious plants spring up in rank exuberance; but they are barren in all that is

good. This heavenly disposition comes down only from the Father of lights. The heart of man must be regenerated by the special, effectual agency of the Holy Spirit, before the disposition to perform good works can exist, or the good works themselves be performed.

Nor is it true, that all which the renewed man does, is good. As it is the purity of the motive that gives value to the action, so that is a good work, which has a *good end* in view, at *the time* the action is performed. The highest end, and that at which all good works, either directly or indirectly aim, is the glory of God. God himself has given us the test, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do ALL to the glory of God.*

Every good action has *good*, in some form or other, for its object. It is the design of every good action to communicate happiness. Benevolence is the essence of all moral virtue.

But, brethren, the love of doing good flows only from the heart that is united to Christ. It is by a vital union to Jesus Christ as their living Head, that believers are sustained in every good word and work. By this they are strengthened; without this they languish and die. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, saith the Saviour, except ye abide in me.* It is the heart of faith in Christ, that causes us with sincerity to

keep his commandments, and with assiduity to serve the interest of his kingdom in the world.

That work then is truly good, which is dictated by the heart that is conformed to the precepts of the Gospel; the heart of love—the heart of faith. Hence results the connexion between faith and good works. This is the next thing to be considered.

Having endeavoured to show the nature of faith and of good works, I proceed,

III. To point out the inseparable connexion between them.

This appears from their nature. From what has been said concerning the nature of faith, it follows, that there is no faith which can be separated from good works. In vain does a man say, he has faith, if he have not works. Faith is an exercise of the heart, and, like all other internal exercises, is discerned only by the effects which it produces. *The tree is known by its fruit.* The faith of the Gospel is not the offspring of mere enthusiasm, which exhausts all its force in feeling, and has none left for action. It is not an inactive, dormant principle, which rests in the heart, and never flows forth in the life. It is the nature of faith *to work by love.*

A living principle, brethren, is a principle that lives; an active principle is a principle that acts. It

is absurd to suppose, that the vital principle of faith can be implanted in the heart of man without being productive of good works. Faith in Christ presses the believer to act in conformity to the precepts of God's word. *A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things.* Faith gives reality to future and eternal things, and prompts the believer not only to feel and to act, but to feel and to act under the influence of the most powerful motives. Thus Abraham felt and acted. When God called him *from his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house, to go into a land which he should show him* ; though he knew not the land ; though he knew not the people ; though he knew not his destiny, *he went out not knowing whither he went.* Thus Moses felt and acted. *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king ; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.* *By works, saith the apostle, faith is made perfect.* There is then no perfect faith without works.

From what has been said concerning the nature of good works, it also appears, that there are no good works which can be separated from faith. In vain does a man say, he has works, if he have not faith.

“ The obedience of a Christian,” says the immortal Edwards, “ so far as it is truly evangelical, and performed with the Spirit of the Son, sent forth into the heart, has all relation to Christ, the Mediator, and is but an expression of the soul's believing

union to him.” As well may the fruit ripen, when the root is withered, or the streams flow, when the fountain is dry, as the works of righteousness be performed by a faithless heart.

Thus from the nature of faith, we see that there is no faith which can be separated from good works. From the nature of good works, we see, that there are no good works which can be separated from faith. *Faith and good works are therefore inseparably connected.*

Such is the clear representation of Scripture. Too often do those who *have a name to live*, make a distinction between a life of faith, and a life of obedience. It is an error. A life of faith on the Son of God, is none other than a life of obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. *Faith without works*, says the apostle in the context, *is dead. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.* The expressions are strong and full of meaning. As the body without the soul is but a dead carcass, so faith without works is dead also.—Good works are the breath, the life of faith. They are that by which faith lives and acts, and are therefore faith itself, living and acting.

Having thus endeavoured to establish the proposition which was laid down in the beginning of the discourse, I shall proceed to make a few practical reflections.

In reviewing what has been said, we cannot fail to notice,

1. THE SUPERIOR EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

The religion of Christ is not a system of notions which was formed to regulate the reveries of enthusiasm, or the deceptions of hypocrisy; but a system of principles formed to regulate the views, feelings, and conduct of men. It is altogether a practical thing. Herein consists its excellence. The principle which the Gospel urges as the spring of human action, is an active, godlike principle, emanating from the exhaustless source of all good; ennobling the heart, and diffusing life and joy to all that are within the sphere of its influence. The Gospel inculcates that faith which *worketh by love and purifieth the heart*, as the native source of all that we think, of all that we feel, and of all that we do.—It makes a comprehensive claim upon the affections. It aims at the heart, and forms the life, by first forming the disposition of the soul.

A religion thus excellent in its principles, must, from its nature, promote the well-being of mankind. It is not the prevalence of the noble, the ingenuous, the benevolent, the believing spirit of the Gospel, that has made this world “a vale of tears.” It is the unbounded prevalence of the spirit of selfishness and unbelief that is the “cause of all our wo.” It

is this, that has made havoc with the happiness of millions ; this, that is the unfailing source of all the unkindness, the covetousness, the dishonesty, the pride, the envy, the murders, the devastation, and war, which, with one continued stream, have deluged our fallen world. But this, the Gospel knows not ; this the blessed Gospel has forbidden.

Man is so helpless, so dependent, not only on the Author of his being, but on his fellow-men, that the spirit of the Gospel is the bond that holds the moral world together. It is this, that will make men just, honest, merciful, charitable, and good ; this, *that suffereth long and is kind ; that envieth not ; that vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up ; doth not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not her own.* It is this, that *worketh no ill to his neighbour* ; this, that controls every sinful passion, and forbids every sinful thought. It is this, that meliorates the cruelty, softens the roughness, and cherishes the tender charities of our nature ; this, that excites that love and friendship, that joy and delight, which sweeten the intercourse between man and man ; this, that binds up the broken hearted ; this, that casts the anchor of hope for the children of sorrow, and bears up the fainting spirit, when wave after wave beats upon its sinking head.

It is no less true than it is melancholy, that perfect happiness is not to be found in a world of sin. The celestial Visitant early took her flight from the garden of Eden when our first father fell, and but for the glimmerings of the Christian's faith, she would have

left the earth a dungeon, darkened with the gloom of night, and chilled with the frost of winter. It is the religion of Jesus, brethren, that enlightens the mind, and that warms and comforts the heart. There is no chamber so gloomy, where the Gospel cannot cheer; no wilderness so dreary, where the Gospel cannot comfort; no dungeon so dark, where the Gospel cannot fill the sufferer with light and joy.

Once more, This subject SHOULD EXCITE CHRISTIANS TO EVINCE THE REALITY OF THEIR RELIGION BY THEIR OBEDIENCE TO ITS PRECEPTS.

The life of the Christian is a life of evangelical obedience. The new-born soul is said to be *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. Vain is that man's religion, which is not exhibited by a life of obedience to the divine commands. Vain is that faith, which is not exhibited by a life of good works. It is not the sudden effusion of a tender and generous heart, that marks the conduct of a good man; he is actuated by an uniform principle of faith. *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, saith the Saviour, he it is that loveth me.*

Believers, how ought you to manifest the disposition of Him, who *though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that you, through his poverty, might be made rich!* How ought you to manifest that heaven-born spirit, which prompted Him to leave the abodes of glory; to assume into personal union

with his own, the nature of fallen man ; to suffer shame, that you might not be ashamed, and drink the bitter cup, that you might not drink it ! How ought you to manifest that kindred spirit, which glowed in the bosoms, and flowed forth in the lives of the Holy Apostles ! They acted as they spoke, *and showed their faith by their works.* The ardour of their faith carried them through a course of exertion, the benefits of which will extend to the last heir of glory that passes over this stage of action. Believers, you have a *cloud of witnesses* before you, and under the influence of that faith which *is the evidence of things not seen*, how ought you *to endure as seeing Him who is invisible !* How ought you to cherish the inward rectitude of your principles by manifesting them in your life and conversation !

Would you, brethren, answer the great end of your being ? Remember, that *to do good* is the great end of your existence. It was for this, that you were created ; for this, that you were redeemed ; for this, that you are sanctified. Would you glorify your Father who is in Heaven ? Remember, *herein is your Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.* Would you honour the gospel which you profess ? Show then, that it is a gospel, which, while it proclaims, *Glory to God in the highest*, proclaims also, *Peace on earth, and good will toward men.* Would you administer to the comfort of your own hearts ? Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said,

It is more blessed to give than to receive." How blessed indeed is the character of that man, who like his Divine Master, *goes about doing good!* Where the Saviour has implanted the benevolent spirit of the gospel; where he sheds forth the rich drops of grace upon the soul; there love, peace, and delight spring up like thriving plants, in a kindly and well watered soil. Every act of benevolence that the good man performs, excites in his own bosom the sublimest joy. How enviable the character of him, on whom Sorrow reclines her drooping head; in whom, Adversity finds a solace from her pains!

I come this evening, brethren, in behalf of a Society of Ladies, whose benevolent design commands our commendation and our aid, to give you an opportunity of *evincing the power of your faith.* This charitable association was instituted, "FOR THE RELIEF OF POOR WIDOWS WITH SMALL CHILDREN." They have now dependent upon their efforts, *One hundred and fifty Widows, together with between Four and Five hundred children under ten years of age.* I am authorized to say, that through the pressure of a severe winter, and the number of those whom they have been called to relieve, they are now wholly destitute of active funds. I come then, brethren, without ceremony, to beg for the Widow and the Fatherless.

When the ear heard me, says Job, then it blessed me. When the eye saw me, then it gave witness to

me ; because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the Widow's heart to sing for joy. You are daily passing by these children of sorrow, and the sound of distress should never die away upon the ear without affecting the heart. The wants of those who crave your charity are not few and imaginary ; they are multiplied and real. If there be a name which bears in its very sound an irresistible appeal to the heart of benevolence ; it is the name of " WIDOW." If there be one of our fallen race that drinks the very dregs of the cup of bitterness ; it is the *helpless mother of helpless and fatherless children.*

The event of this evening will cause tears of gratitude and joy, or tears of despondency and grief. To you, the eyes of many a Widow, and many a Fatherless child are now anxiously raised for help. In yonder cottage is one, whose heart, sinking under the pressure of trial, still bleeds at the " remembrance of joys that are past," and trembles at the apprehension of woes that are to come. Lately she passed along this vale of tears, supported by him, who was the partner of her sorrows, and the companion of her joys. But the companion of her joys, and the partner of her sorrows, has gone to that " distant country from whose bourne no traveller returns." Herself a Widow ; her children Fatherless—alone they wander in a world of sorrow and of sin.

Behold, amid the distant throng, the youthful mother. The tear of anguish marks her silent steps. Twelve long months since, the partner of her youth crossed the raging main. The fatal ship that bore him from her arms, has just come proudly to the shore. She went to welcome his return. Hope smiled in her countenance ; joy sparkled in her eye. But, ah ! “ she fancied transports she was not to know.” With anxious heart, she waits the cheerful greeting ; but while she waits, she hears —her friend and helper is no more. He lies forgotten in a land of strangers.

Such are the claims of misery and misfortune ; claims, sanctioned by every sentiment of humanity, and enforced by every principle of religion. Who, then, will refuse to deal his bread to the hungry ; to comfort the heart of the languishing and the discouraged ; and to cheer the mansion of poverty and of sorrow ? Who but the cold and unfeeling bosom of avarice itself, can behold the desponding sufferer, and, like the hard-hearted *Levite* and the merciless *Priest*, *pass by on the other side !*

Brethren, *the fashion of this world passeth away*. Suffer me to remind you that you are hastening to the grave. To this I am prompted, because it is my melancholy office to remind you of the death of one of the Managers of the Society, in whose behalf I address you. One, who aided your exertions, my

sisters, in founding an Institution which has flourished under the smiles of her pious patronage ; one, whose heart felt deeply for the Widow's wo, and whose hand was " open as day to melting charity," now sleeps in yonder vault. Long will the name of *Sarah Mills** live in the hearts of the helpless. The fatherless shall *rise up and call her blessed*.

The time is short. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest. Ever bear in mind, that that faith which worketh by love ; that faith which is the substance of things hoped for ; that faith which unites the sleeping dust of the believer to Him who is the resurrection and the life ; can alone shed a lustre around the evening of death, and light up the glimmerings of hope amid the night of the grave.

May that faith be yours. And may the God of grace shed abroad his love into your hearts ; work in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, and to his great name be the glory for ever. *Amen.*

* Mrs. Mills, the wife of John Mills, departed this life Sept. 19, 1810.